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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002107

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STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA  
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: RUMORS FROM THE NIGER DELTA

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On October 16, Poloffs met with Olafemi Aduwo (protect), founder of the Rights Monitoring Group. In a rambling conversation, Aduwo made several claims about former Chief of Defense Staff Owoye Azazi and imprisoned arms dealer Henry Okah which were both interesting and, though unverifiable, seemed to parallel some of the rumors Post has heard concerning these two Niger Delta-related personalities -- specifically, that Azazi was compromised on Niger Delta issues and Okah holds information on the GON's activities in the Niger Delta that, if revealed, would be highly embarrassing. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On October 16, Poloffs met with Olafemi Aduwo, founder of the human rights NGO Rights Monitoring Group (RMG). Aduwo, a native of Ondo State, said he is the nephew of 1979-1983 Chief of Naval Staff and former military governor of Western State Akin Aduwo, and came back from exile in Ghana in 2000 where he fled to seek protection from the Abacha regime. He said he was "heavily involved in the June 12 incident," where Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola's apparent 1993 legitimate election victory was overturned by Ibrahim Babangida (he did not specify his own role, but presumably it was one of support for Abiola and a free and fair election). He also said that, in more recent years, the RMG has worked closely with former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission chairman Nuhu Ribadu to gather evidence against high-profile suspects. (Note: While Post has seen RMG referenced in press reports, we have not worked directly with them in the past. End note.)

¶3. (C) In the course of the conversation, Aduwo claimed that it was "well-known" that former CDS Azazi, an ethnic Ijaw, was in contact and collusion with certain Niger Delta militants during his tenure at Defense Headquarters. Aduwo claimed that Azazi had his own jetty, from which he ran his own set of refineries which processed illegally bunkered oil. He also claimed that "boys" would visit Abuja every two weeks to pay Azazi a cut of their proceeds and in turn he would pass them information about the activities of the Joint Task Force.

¶4. (C) Aduwo also claimed that the reason why imprisoned arms dealer Henry Okah is being tried in secret is that the GON wants to prevent the airing of recordings Okah made while negotiating with the President and Vice President Goodluck

Jonathan. Aduwo asserted that Okah's trip to southern Africa (Aduwo did not specify the date, but Okah was arrested in Angola in September 2007) was part of secret negotiations he was carrying on with Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, and while there he also spoke by telephone to Yar'Adua himself. Aduwo maintained Okah recorded these conversations, and presumably is planning to release them at some point during the trial, presumably in an attempt to either blackmail or simply embarrass the GoN.

15. (C) COMMENT: Post is unable to confirm (or disprove) the details of Aduwo's claims. Azazi was frequently cited as compromised on Niger Delta issues, but specifics about his alleged corruption were hard to come by; Aduwo's claims add a little flesh to the bones. And of the many theories floated publicly about the reason for Okah's closed trial -- most speculated that he will reveal embarrassing details about arms sales to the militants from the GON's own armories -- Aduwo's claims are new and somewhat more compelling, given that a good deal of information about GON arm sales is already in the public domain. END COMMENT.

16. (C) Bio Note: Aduwo seems to be famous primarily for being well-known -- he somehow appears in Nigerian newspapers with great frequency as a sought-after commentator on current events, but seems to add little value to the projects he joins and rarely offers any opinions that are not commonly held by other Nigerians. He does, however, seem to maintain a good contact list and good ties to key Nigerian governmental organizations -- he is traveling next week to the U.S. on an election observation mission for the

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Independent National Electoral Commission, and claims to work out of the Presidential Villa.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
Sanders